

Cut Bait

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Summary: Worm scenes and vignettes. AU starts with Danny and Taylor against the Terrible Trio in the Principals office. Alan Barns is reminded that power comes in many forms and some things get settled out of court.

## 1. Chapter 1

AN; Back to writing again. I only write when I'm going through some real life excretory matter, so hope this well dries up soon.

This is set during Hive 5.4 from Worm, the meeting with the Terrible Trio and the School Principal. Takes place from either Taylor's or Danny's POV.

\* \* \*

><p><em>"For the last time, Alan, shut up," my dad growled, "My daughter is right. This has been a joke. I have a friend in the media. I think I'm going to give her a call, email her that list of emails and the list of incidents. Maybe pressure from the public would get things done."<em>

\_"I hope it doesn't come to that, Danny," Alan replied, "If you recall, your daughter assaulted and battered Emma just last night. That's in addition to threatening her, here. We could press charges. I do have the surveillance video from the mall, and a signed slip from that teenage superheroine, Shadow Stalker, that verifies she saw it happen, in what could have provoked a riot."\_

\_Oh. So that was why Emma had been so confident. She and her dad had an ace up their sleeve.\_

\_"There's mitigating circumstances," my dad protested, "She has a concussion, she was provoked, she only hit Emma once. The charges wouldn't stick."\_

"No. But the case could drag out for some time. When our families used to have dinner together, you remember me saying how most cases were resolved?"

"Decided by who ran out of money first," my dad said. I felt him clutch me a fraction tighter.

"I may be a divorce attorney, but the same applies in a criminal case."

If we went to the media, he'd press assault charges just to drain our bank accounts.

\* \* \*

><p>"Alan," my dad's voice suddenly cold, "Speak with me outside."<p>

"Anything we have to discuss," Mr. Barnes began, before he was cut off by my dad again.

"Now," I had seen my dad angry before, I had even seen him fly off the handle and lose his temper, but the expression on his face as he jerked the door open showed new depths of emotion I had never considered. I'd rather be back on that rooftop with Lung than be Mr. Barnes right now.

"Please excuse us for just one moment," Alan Barnes stood calmly and moved to the doorway.

\* \* \*

><p>I fixed my gaze on one of my family's oldest friends and began to understand how my daughter must have felt. I pushed aside the blinding fury that threatened to overwhelm me and spoke as calmly as I could, which only meant I bit my words out instead of screaming them, "Alan, we've been friends for many years so I am going to give you precisely one chance to explain yourself and show me there is a decent human being somewhere inside there."<p>

"We were friends," Alan replied, and I couldn't help but notice the past tense he applied, "But at the end of the day, I have to do what's right for my daughter."

I laugh in his face, "Put a pin in that just for a minute please, I'll get back to it, I promise. Alan, have you ever stopped to ponder what makes a man powerful?"

He stopped short, "What does that have to do with anything?"

"There are many types of power. Most people would look at you and see a powerful man to some degree. A Partner at a prestigious law firm, wealth, a nice car, a good looking wife and child. You're successful," I patted him on the shoulder just a little too hard, "Me on the other hand, less so. I can barely pay my bills, my car is older than my daughter, I'm barely a figurehead for a dying industry, and I didn't even inherit my father's strength or size to even things out. Hardly a paragon of strength or power."

"Despite that," I raised a finger, "I have gone toe to toe with the Mayor and the City Council fighting for jobs for my men. I have traded favor after favor to put food on the tables for over one hundred families in Brockton Bay. I have even stood up to Villians in this city and demanded they treat my men right while they have to hench to pay bills. I have accepted that I will never be rich, I'd have to cut my workers margins to the bone to accomplish that. I've accepted that I will never have the trappings and recognition, but make no mistake I do have a kind of power."

"I have the power of phone numbers, of favors, of blind eyes and silent tongues. I have the power of a union behind me, and our union has ties to other unions. Police and Sanitation for instance. I have the power of loyal men, hardened by years of heavy work. Some of them have no family and what can euphemistically be called a colorful history. Some of those men might even have less savory friends who might like to know response times are going to be slower in certain neighborhoods," I could see the moment he understood what I was not saying, "You and those girls have placed me in a dangerous situation. If I go back into that room right now, you've arranged things so there will be no justice for us. You've backed us into a corner and proved that we cannot win but, much like a cornered rat, even if we cannot win we can go down swinging."

"You said you had to do what's best for your daughter," I looked him in the eye. "Well I am doing what is best for mine, starting right here and now. Walk away Alan. If you want what's best for your daughter, walk away, because what happens next will not be settled in court."

"Look, I know we've been through a lot," Alan raised his hands pleadingly, "But I can't..."

"We have been through a lot haven't we?" I raised an eyebrow. "Remember when my father invited you into our home and called you his second son? Remember when you slept on my couch while I worked in the docks and you struggled through law school? Remember when I bailed you out of jail after a party with your law school friends got out of hand?"

"Of course I remember those things," He replied. "But I'm not going to let you ruin Emma's life."

"Then give me something in return," I stared him down, letting my temper loose as I growled out my demand. "Taylor's life, for Emma's. You go back in there, drop this, and get Taylor on the top of Arcadia's list? Then we're square and I pretend we've never met. Anything less, and I go to the mattresses."

Alan started to protest and I could see him pulling up all sorts of legal bullshit to turn this around, but I kept my eyes locked on his and refused to budge an inch while he squirmed. Finally, he sighed, and turned towards the door.

\* \* \*

><p>When Mr. Barnes came back into the room, he had the look of someone who just survived a car crash. He looked shocked, confused, angry, and just a touch scared, "Principle Blackwell, Emma will take that suspension and we will be dropping any complaint about what

happened at the mall. Thank you for your time, but I think it's best if I have a long talk with my daughter at home."<p>

My dad walked in behind him and jerked a thumb over his shoulder. The other adults in the room started to protest and I could see whatever just happened was going to change where things lay, but I hurried to go with my father. It was clear to me that no one in the room wanted to help me, so I went with the only one who did.

"I'll be withdrawing you from Winslow in the morning," Dad told me as we walked through the halls towards the parking lot. "You can study at home until your transfer to Arcadia goes through."

"But they just said they wouldn't allow me to transfer," I protested.

"I reminded Barnes of something he never should have forgotten," Dad said darkly. "He's going to make this go away and secure your transfer because he knows what will happen if he doesn't."

"And what will happen?" I asked, quietly, not wanting to upset my dad but still not trusting the system to do anything but cover their own asses.

"When I was a young man, before I met your mother, I lived a different life. You know that your mother was one of Lustrum's followers, stirring up radical feminist sentiment and protesting at colleges. What you don't know is that when I first started working on the Docks, I took money from Galvanate to look the other way or pull some things out of otherwise normal shipments. I'm not proud of it, but the old mob wasn't like the gangs we have today. They had a code of honor and they treated people like family once they were in. It didn't hurt that they were well enough established to ensure no one messed with them while most cape gangs were starting from the ground up. I think he was quoting a movie, but I once heard him say that if the Marquis put one of his men in the hospital, he would put one of Marquis' in the morgue. Marquis backed down because he knew that even if he won, it would be too costly to continue."

"Let's just say that from working in the docks I know a lot of men whose morals are flexible, and think knees should be too," Dad smirked a little bit then grimaced. "I don't like dredging up those times, or being that sort of man, but sometimes there is no choice but to resort to drastic measures. Do they still make you memorize the Declaration of Independence in History class?"

I shook my head, "No, we read it of course, but they don't ask us to memorize it."

"Well it's been a few years for me, the third sentence argues that when a government becomes destructive to the needs and wellbeing of its people, it is not only the right but the duty of all free men to overthrow that government if they need to. It says something about the way this world is going that I find myself thinking about that right now. I'm not a violent man, but if it will keep you safe, I will go to war to protect you."

As if sensing the perfect time to interrupt, my phone chose that moment to let me know I had a text, "Need S here, B needs backup with T and E88. Moving on L soon."

Great, I could do without Bitch's harsh demeanor tonight, but I couldn't leave her alone with the Travelers and the Empire, especially if they were attacking one of Lung's safe houses. I looked back up to my dad, "I need to go. My friends need me."

\_"Stop."\_

\_I paused.\_

\_"I want you to know I love you. This is far from over, and I'll be waiting for you when you come home. Don't give up, and don't do anything reckless."\_

\_I hugged my arms close to my body to get the shaking in my hands to stop.\_

\_"'Kay."\_

\* \* \*

><p>-AN So there's my first published story/collection of scenes under this name in years. Hope someone out there likes it. I've got a series of Vignettes in mind in this AU. Danny is part mama-bear, part union boss, part old mobster, all pissed off... It's doable in universe, he fears his own temper after all so he knows he is capable of great wrath, but I'll admit it's a stretch as he is most often portrayed. Somewhat inspired by the saying "beware the wrath of a patient man". Also moderately inspired by re-watching Doctor Who.

## 2. Chapter 2

AN; More on this series, beginning to diverge from canon a bit more. Canon states there is at least week between Arc 5 (which ended with the fight Taylor left for in the last chapter) and the beginning of Arc 6 (6.04 Taylor mentions a week off to recover from her concussion and injuries but it's all off screen and we've seen stuff on screen since, so at least a week). I'm shoe horning this and one more scene into that week.

Disclaimer; I am not Wildblow, I don't own Worm or its characters.

It was only a few days after the meeting with Principal Blackwell that my Dad asked me to visit him at his office for a meeting. We went in together and I worked on a few assignments Dad had given me until we could get the home schooling or transfer to Arcadia sorted out. It was no surprise that he asked me to review the Declaration of Independence after his comment the other night, but I was surprised when he asked me to read books by Dale Carnegie. I had heard of "How to Win Friends and Influence People" but "The Art of Public Speaking" was new to me and very dense even by my mother's standards. Thankfully I was given a reprieve when Dad's secretary buzzed the intercom.

"Mr. Hebert," the secretary's voice was a little tense, "Your ten thirty appointment is here."

"Thank you Marcy, send them in and give us some privacy please," Dad released the button on his desk and turned to me. "Sit by my side please. I'll handle things for the most part but we will need your input."

Before I could say anything the doors opened and two men walked into the room. The first was a well built man, obviously used to heavy labor or constant exercise, dressed in a tailored black suit with black gloves. He was wearing a rubber skin cap to make him look bald and his bright red tie was held in place with a gold tie-tack with a U made from diamonds. The second was taller and scrawny, dressed as a Catholic priest in flowing vestments. He had a purple stole with an embroidered L around his neck. The domino masks over their faces simply confirmed their identities, Uber and Leet.

I started to bristle, seeing them again after they worked with Bakuda, but managed to force it back down. Uber looked at me and tilted his head for a moment, ok maybe not perfectly under control. I began to gather my swarms outside and in the ceiling tiles above the office, just in case things took a turn.

Uber dismissed me from his notice before addressing my dad, his voice quiet pleasant when he wasn't performing, "Danny, as always it's good to see you again. I hope this isn't just another request for salary raises or benefits. I wish I could help but we are hardly swimming in cash ourselves at the moment."

My dad shook his head, "No, Frank and the others are happy with the current arrangement. Gentlemen, I want to hire you both for a job. You see my daughter, Taylor, has had some issues with bullies. One incident even put her in the hospital, but after exhausting all **\*\*\_legal\_\*\*** means the perpetrators have been allowed to walk away unpunished."

"Danny, we've worked together for years and you've always played straight with us, but you have to understand, there are rules," Leet spoke up, surprisingly he didn't sound as nerdy as I expected, but something he said caught my attention even more than learning the nasal whine he used on his videos was a fake. He knew my father for years? Uber and Leet had only been on the cape scene for a bit over two years... "Capes robbing banks or jewelry stores are just shrugged off as part of doing business. Cape on cape fights are good ratings for the news. But capes going after normal folks? That's a ticket to the Birdcage."

"I'm not asking you to hurt anyone," Dad replied with just a little emphasis on the word, hurt, "I just thought you might want a volunteer to costar in your next video and a donation towards any costs you might run into."

"You see gentlemen," my father placed a folder on the desk and took two photos out of it, before leaning back in his chair. It was almost stereotypical movie mob boss how he looked, "If I wanted legs broken, I'd call someone else. I initially wanted to have a few people followed, maybe corner them as they get to their car some dark night, put a little fear into them and let them know this wasn't over. Now I can understand a fit young track star being able to give somebody the slip. Even if they went into an alley with only one entrance. Maybe she had a friend with an open window to escape into. But if my friends also told me that tailing that bitch of a social worker had

her calling for help and PRT wagons appearing out of nowhere? That might make me suspicious. A bit more digging and I find out that Winslow High, which outright refused to punish these girls, has been receiving numerous private donations from supposed alumni in the last year that add up to a substantial amount. I imagine you can put together the facts as well as I can."

"You found a Ward," Uber's voice was half awed at the revelation and half resigned. He knew better than I the Unwritten Rules about a cape's identity. I spent a few seconds considering that myself, before it hit me.

"SHADOW STALKER!" I name came out of my mouth like a swear word, and my bugs buzzed in the walls and ceiling in response to the sudden flare of anger, "They knew about this and they were covering it up! That's why they refused to do anything. If Winslow expelled Sophia, they'd lose the money and the PRT would never admit that one of their own was doing stuff like this."

Dad nodded his head in agreement, looking puzzled by the additional noise but Leet nudged Uber and whispered something that made Uber go very still very quickly.

"Mr. Hebert, I think you need to call Joseph Carmichael," Uber said very cautiously. "And I think we need to get rid of the masks here."

"Why would we need the Union legal counsel? If you're thinking about unmasking to Taylor so you can hire her, we've already got the waivers and liability paperwork?" Danny asked the pair.

"No, Taylor needs Carmichael, not us, and you just spilled more identities than you think," Uber turned to me next and pulled off his domino mask and rubber hair cover, "Taylor, I know this may seem like an excuse, but I need you to understand that what happened with Bakuda was not our choice. My name is Mark and I really don't want fight right now."

"Tim," Leet removed his own mask and hat, nodding, "She had us rigged to blow. On my mother's grave, I swear it."

I looked at them both and saw they were clearly uncomfortable. Did they think I was going to bury them in spiders any second? Was my reputation after last weekend really that big of a deal? I did cut out Lung's eyes, but it was the only way to keep him from killing us all.

"Bakuda?" Dad asked in shock, "You told me your concussion happened because you were too close to one of the random blasts. What's going on? Why would we be fighting?"

I couldn't help shrinking in on myself. Uber and Leet I could have faced head on, mask or no, but I couldn't bear the thought of facing my father, "It was because I was too close to one of her bombs. It just wasn't random. She put bombs inside people and forced them to fight. They chased my friends and I around for a couple hours, blowing stuff up and trying to hurt us."

"Your friends?" Dad asked skeptically. "Are these the same friends that called you the other night while fighting was going on all over

the city? Taylor, just tell me straight, are you in a gang?"

"Kind of," I looked at the floor. "I was trying to be a hero, earn their trust, find out about them, and then turn them into the Protectorate. Things happened and I'm really starting to like them, they're not all bad people. And I still haven't found out who is hiring them to do these things."

"A hero?" Uber and Leet were not about to step in and save me now, they were just watching us and staying quiet. "Are you saying you're a cape too?"

I stood and took a few steps away from the desk, calling my swarms to me as I did. They flowed down from the ceiling and across the floor, arranging themselves around me in a simulacrum of my costume, "They call me Skitter."

My dad fell back into his chair, mouth agape as he tried to take it all in, "You robbed a bank, held people hostage, fought super villains on a web show, and if rumors are true you cut out a man's eyes after he was already down! What happened to my daughter?"

"I didn't want to! You have to understand, I never wanted to hurt anyone. That's why I made myself look so scary all the time. Like a bug that displays warning colors to scare everyone around them. I control bugs for crying out loud! That's hardly something I could use to take over the world. But maybe if people thought I could, they wouldn't fight so hard. You look a certain way, say a few things, and then everyone leaves you alone. That's how it was supposed to be. And Lung will heal, he'll be fine in a week!" I tried to make them understand.

Leet came to my rescue by bursting into laughter, "She's an Internet Badass! Fight me irl bro! I'm jacked."

"Watch out Brockton Bay! This summer, \*\*MOOAARR BEEEEES!\*\*" Uber cackled. "Oh god, you're an undercover hero bluffing everyone around you into thinking you're the second coming of Jack Slash just so you can score a few points with the PRT. Can we film you? People would pay to watch this. By day, quiet little Taylor Herbert, by night bad ass queen of the underworld Skitter."

Even my dad had a small smile on his face, "I'm glad you all find this so funny, but this is nothing to laugh about. Taylor, I think they're right. I need to call the Union's legal counsel but before that you need to join the Union yourself."

"Why would I do that?" I looked at my father with a raised eyebrow. Which he probably couldn't see through the cloud of bugs around my face. Whatever.

"If I call him in because you are my daughter, attorney client privilege will be stretched a smidge since you're not a dockworker. If you join the union, I can call him in for one our workers and anything you and he do will be protected," he explained. "We'll ask you to contribute a percentage of your income to the union based on your seniority, and you will need to do a few jobs here and there just to prove you're a Dock Worker, but it won't be too terrible."



"So, I have to do jobs for you, you get a portion of my take, and it comes with a bunch of guys who help me out if I help them in return? Let me get this straight," I dropped the bugs from my face so I could give him the evil eye. "Your response to me joining a gang is to tell me to join a bigger gang?"

"Hey, at least it has a pension plan," somehow I could tell it was Mark laughing at me and not Uber.

Closing AN, guess the video game for U&L. Uber will give you the series, Leet narrows it down to one game in particular.

End  
file.